



**Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
Block Grant Allocation Plan FFY 2012**

**Public Hearing before Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees**

Testimony delivered September 27, 2011

**Lena Rodriguez, President/CEO
Community Renewal Team, Inc., Hartford, CT**

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members of the Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees:

My name is Lena Rodriguez, and I am the President/CEO of Community Renewal Team. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today on the drastic effect that the State's proposed Energy Assistance Allocation Plan will have on tens of thousands of deserving Connecticut families.

CRT is the largest Community Action Agency in the State, providing services to over 120,000 households annually. It is also the largest provider for Energy Assistance, serving approximately 26% of the eligible families in the State.

Last year we processed benefit applications for more than 33,000 households in our 40 town region. These benefits helped 82,512 individuals remain safe and healthy. Nearly 28,000 of those individuals were under the age of 15, and another 11,200 were over the age of 60.

This year, due to the extremely low level of proposed Federal Funding, the State has decided to serve only 36,000 households Statewide. Benefits will go only to those households that receive deliverable fuel (oil, propane, kerosene, wood, coal).

For the families who come to CRT for energy assistance, this would mean that 61.4% or 18,114 households will go without assistance. To take it a step further, in Hartford – where 77% of our customers are utility-heated households – there will be 8,301 families who are income eligible, but who cannot receive for assistance.

I can not stress enough how dangerous this plan will be for our Connecticut citizens, not only for the eligible families who will not receive assistance, but for all families in our communities. These are drastic cuts that people are not prepared for, in this already struggling economy. With these cuts I am afraid we will see drastic measures that people turn to when in need of assistance. We have already seen this first hand in some of our offices and this is why I implore you to help us help our families this winter season.

As part of the funding reduction, CRT has been cut \$1 million for our operations. This means that 16 staff members have received layoff notices, 15 seasonal positions will not be filled and we are in the process of closing our intake activities in:

Bloomfield, East Hartford, Enfield, Manchester, Newington, Rocky Hill, Wethersfield, Windsor, and Branford.

Our three remaining Energy Assistance offices, two in Hartford and one in Middletown, will serve as the only intake sites. We will also be able to have a person one day a week in West Hartford with the support given by the town.

At our call center where we serve our 40 towns, we have been receiving an average of 600 calls a day and have received up to 1,000 calls with 6 staff people. We are still accepting appointments for utility customers, as these households have to be on file to take advantage of the utility company's matching payment program at the end of the

season. As of today we have appointments scheduled for 10,240 customers, out to March 15th.

What I have outlined for you this afternoon is the effect this plan will have on CRT's customers and its staff. This problem is compounded by the effect it will have on the other 11 community action agencies that serve the state.

I join with other agency Executives to ask that you reject the proposed Low Income Energy Plan, and call upon Washington to provide a more reasonable funding level.

- ✓ We must maintain FFY 2011 benefit levels (including utility and renter households).
- ✓ We must restore FFY 2011 funding levels for staffing.
- ✓ We must maintain "fuel blind" basic benefits

We strongly encourage you to rework this Allocation Plan. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Community Renewal Team, Inc.

555 Windsor Street, Hartford, CT 06120

Contact information:

Nancy Pappas, Communication Officer
860-306-3777 or pappasn@crtct.org

Speaker information:

Lena Rodriguez, President/CEO of CRT
lenar@crtct.org